

CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Hartford

To: State Board of Education

From: Theodore S. Sergi, Commissioner of Education

Subject: Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST) Program Portfolio Performance Results,
1999-2002

Executive Summary

This report provides an analysis of BEST portfolio performance between 1999-2002 and related demographic data for those beginning teachers submitting portfolios in the spring of 2002 who were required to meet the portfolio performance standard. In addition, the report includes program evaluation data regarding mentor support and teacher opinions of the portfolio assessment. Highlights of the report are summarized below.

Background of the BEST Program

The Connecticut State Department of Education's BEST Program is an outgrowth of Connecticut's long-standing policy that recognizes that a well-qualified and trained teaching force is integral to improving student achievement. The BEST Program fulfills the statutory mandate that beginning teachers be provided a mentor and demonstrate the attainment of professional standards of teaching competency in order to be eligible for continued certification.¹

First implemented in 1989, the BEST Program has evolved into a two-year comprehensive program of *support* and *assessment*. The support component consists of school- or district-based mentors or support teams and state-sponsored training, such as portfolio clinics and discipline-specific support seminars. The assessment component requires beginning teachers in their second year of teaching to submit a content-specific teaching portfolio. The portfolio documents a 6-8 hour unit of instruction with one class, including teacher lesson plans, videotaped segments of teaching, the work of two students, and reflective commentaries on the teaching and learning that took place during the unit. In order to be eligible for the provisional educator certificate, beginning teachers must demonstrate through the portfolio assessment mastery of essential teaching competencies related to teacher content knowledge, planning, instruction and assessment. Beginning teachers who do not successfully complete the portfolio assessment in year two are required to submit a portfolio in their third of teaching.

Key Findings of Report and Policy Implications

- The vast majority of beginning teachers successfully completed the portfolio assessment with their first submission.
- Beginning teachers in priority districts do not do quite as well in the portfolio assessment as those beginning teachers in the more affluent districts.
- The majority of beginning teachers reported receiving adequate support from their mentors during both their first and second years of teaching.
- Beginning teachers also reported receiving support from other individuals, and reported relatively high levels of satisfaction with support received from these individuals.
- Beginning teachers reported that the portfolio afforded them the opportunity to demonstrate their teaching competency.

¹ Subsection (d) of Sections 10-145f and 10-220a of the Connecticut General Statutes

The Department will continue to make improvements to the BEST Program. Examples of initiatives this year include:

- (1) Continued streamlining of portfolio requirements;
- (2) Review and improvement of individualized portfolio performance profiles provided to each beginning teacher;
- (3) Encouragement of principles, mentors and other colleagues or supervisors to accompany beginning teachers to portfolio assessment conferences, which are offered to all beginning teachers who do not initially “pass” the portfolio assessment;
- (4) Expansion of professional development opportunities for administrators and other educators around the portfolio process;
- (5) Encouragement for districts to use expanded federal Title II Teacher Quality grants to support beginning teachers and their mentors; and
- (6) Promoting a “master mentor” model of support, in which trained teacher leaders provide support and training to mentors, support colleagues and beginning teachers at the building level. Currently, 15 districts are participating in this year’s “pilot.”

The state’s current and projected fiscal situation present the BEST Program with challenges as the Department seeks to continue its mission of training both novice and experienced educators in effective teaching practices. As noted earlier, the high success rate of beginning teachers completing the BEST portfolio is due to the availability of trained mentors/mentor teams and access to high quality professional development, both at the state, regional and local district level.

The BEST Program—as well as related initiatives to attract and retain qualified teachers in every Connecticut classroom—will need to be examined critically to ensure that the federal mandates of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation are fulfilled. The BEST program will also need to continue playing a key role in Connecticut’s agenda of promoting a high quality teaching force as integral to ensuring equity and excellence for all Connecticut students. As a consequence, the Department will be convening a task force during the calendar year 2003 to re-examine Connecticut’s Continuum for Teacher Quality to ensure that all its teachers and school leaders develop programs that will build upon the successes of the past and meet the challenges of the future.

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BEGINNING EDUCATOR SUPPORT AND TRAINING (BEST) PROGRAM PORTFOLIO PERFORMANCE RESULTS 1999-2002

Background

The Connecticut State Department of Education's Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST) Program is an outgrowth of Connecticut's long-standing educational policy agenda that recognizes that a well-qualified and trained teaching force is integral to improving student achievement. The BEST Program fulfills the statutory mandate that beginning teachers be provided a mentor and demonstrate the attainment of professional standards of teaching competency in order to be eligible for continued certification.¹

First implemented in 1989, the BEST Program has evolved into a two-year comprehensive program of *support* and *assessment*. The support component consists of school- or district-based mentors or support teams and state-sponsored training, such as portfolio clinics and discipline-specific support seminars. The assessment component requires beginning teachers in their second year of teaching to submit a teaching portfolio. In order to be eligible for the provisional educator certificate, beginning teachers must demonstrate—through the portfolio assessment—mastery of essential teaching competencies related to teacher content knowledge, planning, instruction and assessment. Beginning teachers who do not successfully complete the portfolio assessment in year two are required to submit a portfolio in their third of teaching.

The two main goals of the program are: (1) to provide support to new teachers so that they remain in the teaching profession and (2) to promote excellence and equity for Connecticut students by improving teaching—and more importantly—the learning of students. The BEST Program accomplishes these two goals by requiring teachers to have state-trained mentors and holding teachers accountable for meeting licensing standards through the portfolio assessment.

The BEST Portfolio Assessment

The BEST portfolio has been designed to elicit evidence of what teachers actually do in their classrooms on a daily basis—specifically, planning, teaching and evaluating student learning. The portfolio documents approximately 6-8 hours of instruction with one class and includes teacher lesson plans, videotaped segments of teaching (usually two 20-minute segments), and the work of two students during that unit. Teachers prepare daily logs of 1-2 pages each and 10-12 pages of written commentaries in which they reflect on their teaching and their students' learning and tell us what they would do differently if they were to teach the lesson or unit again. The remainder of the portfolio documentation consists of student work samples and materials used in the teaching of the unit (handouts, daily assignments, etc.). Portfolios are scored by experienced teachers in the same content area as the beginning teacher who undergo over 50 hours of extensive training as portfolio scorers and who meet proficiency standards for portfolio scoring. It takes approximately 4-6 hours for an assessor to evaluate and score a teaching portfolio.

The portfolio assessment must meet assessment standards that have been developed by the Joint Committee of the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education. These standards require that the assessment be both

¹ Subsection (d) of Sections 10-145f and 10-220a of the Connecticut General Statutes.

valid (i.e., the portfolio measures what it is intended to measure) and *reliable* (i.e., standards are applied consistently by assessors in the evaluation process). Accordingly, the portfolio scoring process must be comprehensive and consistent, and assessors must demonstrate that they can apply judgment in a prescribed and consistent manner through the “proficiency process.”

Portfolio Performance Standards

Beginning in 1999, portfolios in different content areas have been phasing into “full implementation status”—that is, beginning teachers completing portfolios are held to a minimum performance standard. Portfolio scores range from a “1” (representing the lowest performance) to “4” (representing the highest performance). In order to “pass” the BEST portfolio assessment, beginning teachers must achieve a score of “2” or higher on the portfolio assessment. Beginning teachers who score a “1” in their second year of teaching are eligible for a third year in the BEST Program and up to two additional opportunities to submit a portfolio. Any teacher failing to meet the performance standard in year three is ineligible for reissuance of the initial certificate. However, these individuals may re-enter the teaching profession by completing an approved plan of intervening study and experience² and meeting the requirements for the initial educator certificate.

The following chart summarizes the portfolio content areas in the “full implementation” status:

School Year	Content Areas in "Full" Implementation Status
1999-2000	English language arts, mathematics, science
2000-2001	English language arts, mathematics, science, special education
2001-2002	English language arts, mathematics, science, special education, elementary education, music, physical education, social studies

Note that during 2001-2002, there were two content areas in which the portfolio assessment has not yet been fully validated (world language and visual arts). These areas will be phased into the full implementation status once development is complete and the portfolio assessment has been deemed reliable and valid.

Contents of this Report

Presented in this report is a comprehensive analysis of BEST portfolio performance and related demographic data for the 1,895 beginning teachers submitting portfolios in the spring of 2002 who were required to meet the portfolio performance status (representing content areas in full implementation status). For comparison purposes, portfolio performance data is also included for those areas in full implementation status in 1999-2000 and 2000-2001. In addition, we have included program evaluation data regarding mentor support and teacher attitudes toward the portfolio assessment. These data are collected through a demographic questionnaire submitted concurrently with the portfolio. Of the 1,895 beginning teachers who submitted portfolios in 2001-2002, questionnaires were received from 1,844 individuals, which represents a 97 percent response rate.

² Current guidelines for eligibility for reissuance of the initial educator certificate through completion of intervening study and experience were approved by the State Board on October 3, 2001.

BEST 2001-2002 TEACHER DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

TABLE 1 presents Connecticut teacher demographics for the school year 2001-2002, including numbers of beginning teachers enrolled in BEST during this year and numbers of experienced teachers who had been or continue to be involved in the BEST program as either mentors or portfolio scorers to this date. TABLE 1 also presents the number of BEST graduates (those completing portfolios) who were teaching in Connecticut during 2001-2002, and as of this year, the numbers of BEST graduates who had been trained to serve as mentors or portfolio scorers.

As shown in TABLE 1, the impact of BEST in terms of numbers has been considerable. As of 2001-2002, more than one-quarter (27%) of Connecticut's certified teaching population have been trained as either a mentor or a BEST portfolio scorer. Approximately 12,000 teachers have completed BEST portfolios, and a considerable percent age of these (19%) trained as either mentors or portfolio scorers.

TABLE 1. 2001-2002 Connecticut Teacher Demographics

# Certified Teachers in CT:	
Teachers	43,989
Pupil Services Specialists	3,961
Administrators	2,987
TOTAL	50,937
# BEST Beginning Teachers:	
Year 1	2,949
Year 2	2,368
Year 3	182
TOTAL	5,499
# Certified Staff Mentor Trained	12,392
# Certified Staff Scorer Trained	1,151
TOTAL	13,543
# Certified Staff Serving as Mentors for 1 st and 2 nd year teachers	3,600 (approx.)
# Certified Staff Serving as Scorers	578
TOTAL	4,178
# BEST Graduates teaching in CT	12,174
# BEST Graduates Mentor Trained	2,049
# BEST Graduates Scorer Trained	268
TOTAL	2,317

Note: Table numbers are based on the total number of certified staff, not FTE counts.

TABLE 2. BEST Beginning Teachers, 2001-2002: Content Area & School Type (n=1895)

	#	%
CONTENT AREA	Elementary Education	841 45%
	English Language Arts	196 10%
	Math	116 6%
	Music	79 4%
	Physical Education	113 6%
	Science	159 8%
	Social Studies	155 8%
	Special Education	236 13%
	Group Total	1895 100%
SCHOOL TYPE	Elementary Education	971 51%
	Middle/Junior High School	351 19%
	High School	479 25%
	Other	94 5%
Group Total		1895 100%

TABLE 2 shows the distribution of teachers across the eight content areas and the school type where they taught. The majority of teachers were elementary education teachers (45%), followed by special education (13%) and English language arts teachers (10%). Approximately half (51%) of the teachers were teaching in elementary schools.

TABLE 3 shows gender, ethnicity and degree status statistics for the beginning teachers who completed BEST portfolios in content areas held to a performance standard in 2001-2002.

- Almost three-quarters (73%) of the 2001-2002 beginning teacher BEST portfolio population is female. Gender distribution is similar for the entire Connecticut teacher population.

- The majority of 2001-2002 beginning teachers were white, with a 7 percent minority representation consisting of Asian American, Hispanic, Native American and black teachers. Like gender, this race distribution is similar for the entire Connecticut teacher population.

- More than 40 percent (43%) of the 2001-2002 beginnings teachers held Master's degrees.

TABLE 3. BEST Beginning Teachers, 2001-2002: Gender, Ethnicity & Degree Status (n=1895)

		#	%
GENDER	Female	1376	73%
	Male	519	27%
Group Total		1895	100%
ETHNICITY	Asian American	25	1%
	Black	59	3%
	Hispanic	42	2%
	Native American	15	1%
	White	1754	93%
Group Total		1895	100%
DEGREE STATUS	Ph.D.	19	1%
	Sixth Year Degree	32	2%
	Master's Degree	808	42%
	Bachelor's Degree	1036	55%
Group Total		1895	100%

TABLE 4. BEST Beginning Teachers, 2001-2002: ERG Distribution (n=1895)

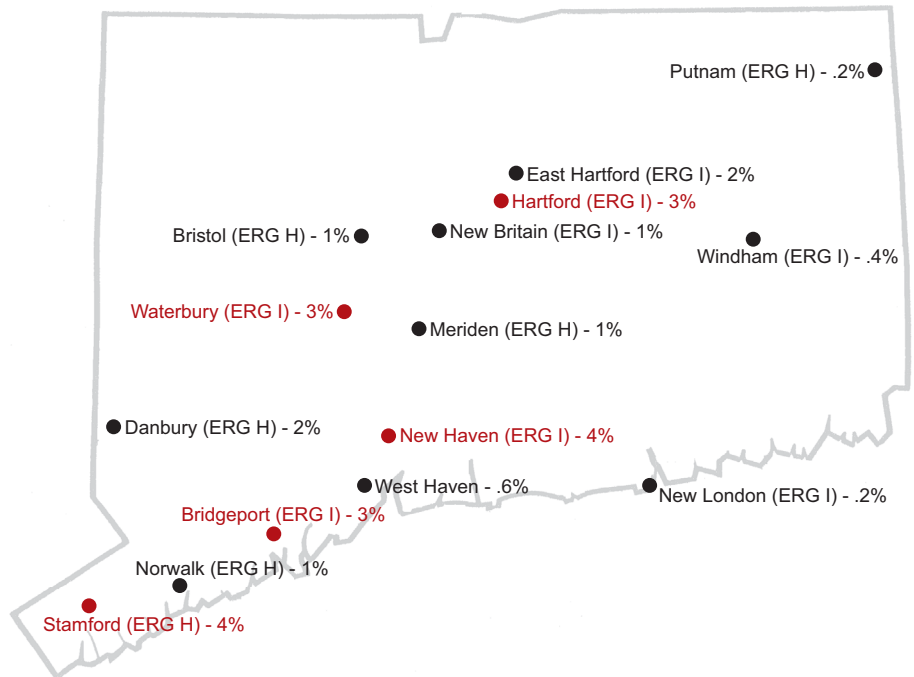
		#	%
DISTRICT ERG	A (12 districts)	156	8%
	B (19 districts)	283	15%
	C (38 districts)	137	7%
	D (21 districts)	237	13%
	E (26 districts)	66	4%
	F (16 districts)	250	13%
	G (16 districts)	84	4%
	H (14 districts)	272	14%
	I (7 districts)	288	15%
	Not Applicable	122	7%
Group Total		1895	100%

TABLE 4 shows Educational Reference Group (ERG) statistics for the 2001-2002 BEST portfolio cohort for content areas held to the performance standard. ERGs divide Connecticut's 166 districts and three academies into nine groups, A thru I, based upon socio-economic status, indicators of need and enrollment. The most affluent Connecticut cities/towns are in ERG A; the least affluent in ERG I.

As shown in TABLE 4, nearly 30 percent of beginning teachers were employed in the 21 districts comprised of ERGs H and I. All ERG I districts and seven out of fourteen ERG H districts participated in the Connecticut Priority School District Program, which targets schools in Connecticut with the greatest academic need and funds initiatives that focus on improving the quality of schools in these districts.

DIAGRAM 1 shows all priority school districts in Connecticut for 2001-2002 (with the exception of Bloomfield, ERG F, which is currently phasing out of the Priority School District Program), with ERG categories and exact percentages of beginning teachers who completed portfolios in content areas held to the performance standard for 2001-2002. A total of 503 (27%) of beginning teachers who completed portfolios in 2001-2002 in content areas held to the BEST performance standard were employed in priority school districts.

DIAGRAM 1. Connecticut Priority School Districts and Beginning Teacher Population, 2001-2002

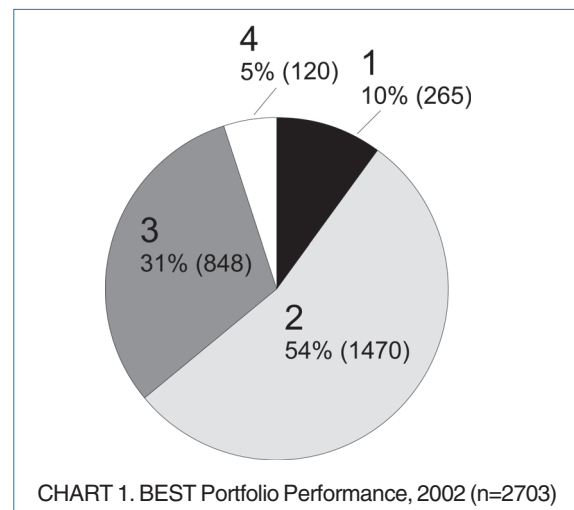


TEACHER PREPARATION

The beginning teachers who completed portfolios in 2001-2002 were also asked where and at what level they completed teacher preparation coursework related to their current certification and teaching position in Connecticut. They were provided with a list of all Connecticut universities as well as an “Out-of-State” option, and asked to make selections from these responses for both undergraduate and graduate level preparation. They were also provided with an “Alternate-Route-to-Certification” (ARC) option. Seventy-two percent of the beginning teachers reported that they had completed teacher preparation coursework at Connecticut universities at the undergraduate or graduate level, or both. Six percent of the teachers reported that they were ARC graduates and 12 percent indicated that they were prepared outside of Connecticut.

BEST 2002 PORTFOLIO PERFORMANCE

CHART 1 shows the distribution of portfolio scores for the 2001-2002 beginning teacher cohort for all teachers in those content areas that were held to the performance standard. Please note that the total number of teachers included in this distribution of scores is 2,703 rather than 1,895. This is due to elementary teachers receiving separate portfolio scores for literacy and numeracy. Elementary education teachers are required to demonstrate competency in both teaching literacy and teaching numeracy in order to pass the BEST portfolio. If teachers pass one area (e.g., the literacy portion of the portfolio) but fail the other (e.g., the numeracy portion of the portfolio), they are required to resubmit another numeracy teaching performance for



scoring. Included in the 2,703 total are the number of elementary education literacy scores and the number of elementary education numeracy scores. As shown by the pie chart, the distribution of portfolio scores resembles somewhat of a “normal” distribution, with scores mostly in the “2” and “3” categories and comparatively fewer scores in the tails of the distribution, or the “1” and “4” performance categories. The majority of scores fall into the “2” performance category, which is the level at which we would expect most beginning teachers to perform.

TABLE 5 shows 2001-2002 portfolio score distributions for individual content areas as well as scores for the content areas held to performance standard in 1999-2000 and 2000-2001. Again, note the separate counts for elementary education literacy and numeracy scores for 2001-2002.

In aggregate over the last three school years, approximately 90 percent of beginning teachers submitting portfolios in content areas under full implementation status have successfully completed the BEST portfolio in their first attempt. To date, 24 beginning teachers have failed to meet the performance standard in their third year of teaching or failed to submit a portfolio at all. This number represents approximately 2 percent of the 1,056 beginning teachers who were held to a performance standard during 1999-2000 and 2000-2001. These preliminary figures indicate the success of the BEST program’s goal of improving teaching practice through feedback on the portfolio assessment, district and school-based support and state-sponsored professional development. The 265 beginning teachers who received a score of “1” during 2001-2002 will have up to two additional opportunities to resubmit a portfolio during the 2002-2003 school year. Data on the pass rates of this cohort of third year teachers will be presented to the State Board December, 2003.

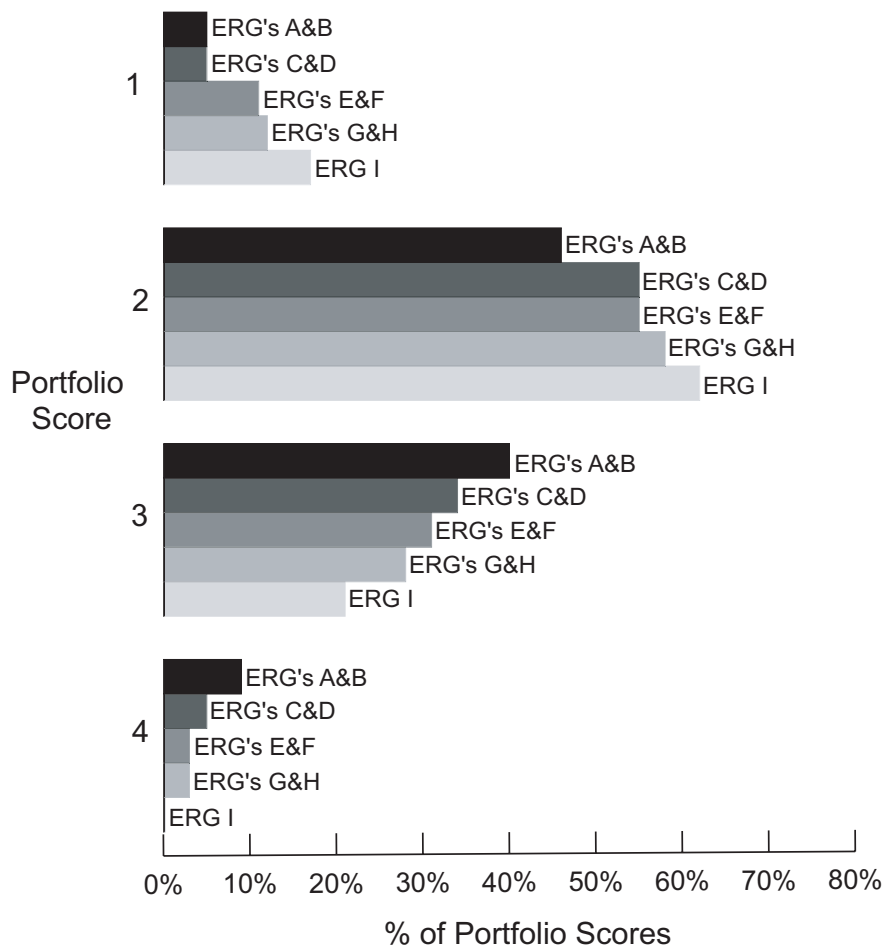
TABLE 5. BEST Portfolio Performance, 1999-2002					
CONTENT AREA	PORTFOLIO SCORE				
Year 1999- 2000	1	2	3	4	TOTAL
English Language Arts	12 (8%)	47 (32%)	52 (35%)	37 (25%)	148
Math	5 (7%)	38 (56%)	24 (35%)	1 (2%)	68
Science	14 (12%)	61 (52%)	34 (29%)	8 (7%)	117
TOTAL	31 (9%)	146 (44%)	110 (33%)	46 (14%)	333
Year 2000- 2001					
English Language Arts	40 (21%)	68 (35%)	65 (33%)	22 (11%)	195
Math	11 (9%)	52 (42%)	55 (45%)	5 (4%)	123
Science	13 (8%)	55 (34%)	82 (52%)	9 (6%)	159
Special Education	16 (7%)	137 (56%)	72 (29%)	21 (9%)	246
TOTAL	80 (11%)	312 (43%)	274 (38%)	57 (8%)	723
Year 2001- 2002					
Elem. Ed. - Literacy	75 (9%)	465 (56%)	268 (32%)	23 (3%)	831
Elem. Ed. - Numeracy	98 (12%)	512 (63%)	190 (23%)	18 (2%)	818
English Language Arts	30 (15%)	97 (49%)	58 (30%)	11 (6%)	196
Mathematics	7 (6%)	66 (57%)	37 (32%)	6 (5%)	116
Music	10 (13%)	28 (35%)	29 (37%)	12 (15%)	79
Physical Education	7 (6%)	49 (43%)	45 (40%)	12 (11%)	113
Science	13 (8%)	80 (50%)	48 (30%)	18 (11%)	159
Social Studies	8 (5%)	71 (46%)	60 (39%)	16 (10%)	155
Special Education	17 (7%)	102 (43%)	113 (48%)	4 (2%)	236
TOTAL	265 (10%)	1470 (54%)	848 (31%)	120 (5%)	2703

Note: 31 elem. education teachers completed either the literacy or numeracy parts of the portfolio.
808 elem. education teachers completed both the literacy and numeracy parts of the portfolio.
50 (6%) elem. education teachers failed both the literacy and numeracy parts of the portfolio.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PORTFOLIO SCORES AND ERG

GRAPH 1 shows the relationship between portfolio scores of beginning teachers who completed portfolios in content areas held to a performance standard in 2001-2002 and Connecticut ERG groups. For reporting purposes here, the nine ERG groups have been collapsed into five groups: A&B, C&D, E&F, G&H, and I. Recall that ERG's A&B are comprised of the more affluent districts in Connecticut, while ERG I is comprised of the least affluent districts; and that all of ERG I districts are comprised of the large Connecticut cities — Bridgeport, Hartford, New Britain, New Haven, New London, Waterbury and Windham — and are characterized as Connecticut Priority School Districts. GRAPH 1 shows clearly that teachers teaching in more affluent ERG districts perform better on the BEST portfolio compared to teachers teaching in affluent ERG's. The more affluent the district (e.g., ERG's A&B), the better the portfolio performance; the less affluent the district (e.g., ERG I), the lower the portfolio performance. The breakdown of beginning teacher performance by ERG is important if Connecticut is to reduce its achievement gaps. Given that the state's neediest students are concentrated in the urban and priority school districts, the best qualified and trained teachers must become more available to these districts.

GRAPH 1. The Relationship Between Portfolio Scores and ERG, 2001-2002 (n=2562)



Note: The portfolio score by ERG analysis is based on 2,562 teachers rather than 1,895 due to elementary education teachers receiving separate scores for literacy and numeracy.

MENTOR SUPPORT

All teachers who completed portfolios in 2001-2002 were asked to describe the type of formal mentoring situation they were involved in during their first year of teaching. TABLE 6 shows responses to this question. Over half (55%) said that they had a mentor in their content area who also taught in their school building. Approximately two-thirds (65%) said they had a mentor or mentor support team that provided a content match to their discipline.

TABLE 6. Type of Mentor Support 1st Year of Teaching, 2002 (n=1844)

		#	%
1ST YEAR MENTOR SITUATION	Mentor in content area & building	1023	55%
	Mentor in content area, not building	103	6%
	Mentor in building, not content area	498	27%
	Mentor not in content area or building	61	3%
	Team mentoring-content area & building	77	4%
	Team mentoring-content area, not building	4	.2%
	Team mentoring-building not content area	21	1%
	Other mentor situation	46	2%
	No assigned mentor	11	1%
Group Total		1844	100%

TABLE 7 shows how the 2001-2002 portfolio cohort rank ordered various sources of support during portfolio completion and the level of help they indicated they received from each source. The top two sources of support were other teachers who had either been through the portfolio process themselves, or were currently in the process of developing their own portfolios. For both of these sources of support, over 80 percent of the teachers indicated high levels of satisfaction with the support they received. *Assigned mentors* were the third major source of support for beginning teachers completing portfolios, with approximately 75 percent indicating high levels of satisfaction with the help they received.

TABLE 7. Beginning Teacher Sources of Support, 2002 (n=1880)

Which of the following were sources of support for you as you completed your portfolio?	# said yes	% said yes		% said source was helpful (3 scale points combined)				
Teachers who completed portfolios previously	1265	67%	→	83%	33%	27%	22%	9% 8%
Beginning teachers also completing portfolios	1237	66%	→	81%	32%	26%	24%	11% 9%
Formally assigned mentor	1198	64%	→	76%	35%	22%	20%	10% 14%
BEST seminar leaders	1011	54%	→	76%	20%	26%	30%	13% 11%
Principal	888	47%	→	68%	16%	22%	30%	14% 18%
District facilitator	874	47%	→	65%	15%	20%	31%	17% 18%
Other colleagues	775	41%	→	83%	38%	28%	17%	6% 11%
Department chair	523	28%	→	62%	18%	23%	22%	12% 26%
CSDE teacher-in-residence or scholar-in-residence	371	20%	→	47%	10%	14%	23%	12% 42%

Note: 15 teachers did not respond to this question on the survey.

Teachers were also asked about two additional sources of support related to portfolio completion. Using a response scale ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*, they were asked to what extent they agreed that their teacher preparation program and student teaching experience helped prepare them to complete a portfolio. Seventy percent (70%) indicated that they either strongly agreed or agreed that their teacher preparation courses helped prepare them for BEST portfolio challenges and 65 percent either strongly agreed or agreed that their student teaching experiences helped prepare them.

TEACHER ATTITUDES TOWARD THE PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT

TABLE 8 presents 2001-2002 portfolio cohort responses to nine statements pertaining to the usefulness of completing a BEST portfolio. The questions, shown in TABLE 8, asked teachers if completing a portfolio afforded them the opportunity to demonstrate various teaching competencies, ranging from ability to design and implement instruction to ability to reflect on teaching practices. These competencies align with the Connecticut Common Core of Teaching (CCT) standards for all content areas.

As shown by the table, three-quarters (75%) or more of the 2001-2002 beginning teachers who completed portfolios in online content areas either strongly agreed or agreed with all nine of the impact statements. The highest ranked statement was *Completing this portfolio provided me the opportunity to demonstrate my ability to reflect upon my teaching practices*, with 95 percent of the teachers indicating that they either strongly agreed or agreed with this statement, followed by *my ability to design instruction* (93%), *my ability to monitor and adjust instruction* (92%), *my ability to assess student work* (92%), and *my ability to implement instruction* (90%).

TABLE 8. Beginning Teacher Attitudes Towards the Portfolio Process, 2002

<i>Completing this portfolio provided me the opportunity to demonstrate:</i>	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	TOTAL
my content area knowledge in a way that was not assessed with the Praxis II exam. (n=1826)	339 (19%)	1072 (59%)	331 (18%)	84 (5%)	1826
my understanding of the content standards.(n=1826)	310 (17%)	1293 (70%)	195 (11%)	39 (2%)	1837
my ability to design instruction. (n=1839)	558 (30%)	1161 (63%)	100 (5%)	20 (1%)	1839
my ability to implement instruction. (n=1827)	522 (29%)	1114 (61%)	159 (9%)	32 (1%)	1827
my ability to assess student work. (n=1836)	489 (27%)	1188 (65%)	128 (7%)	31 (1%)	1836
my ability to monitor/adjust instruction based on student assessment. (n=1835)	528 (29%)	1148 (63%)	128 (7%)	31 (1%)	1835
my ability to modify instruction based on accommodations to students' special needs/interests/backgrounds. (n=1837)	440 (24%)	1145 (62%)	217 (12%)	35 (2%)	1837
my ability to manage my classroom. (n=1837)	376 (20%)	993 (54%)	361 (20%)	107 (6%)	1837
my ability to reflect upon my teaching practices. (n=1837)	706 (38%)	1046 (57%)	58 (3%)	27 (2%)	1837

Note: Sample sizes for each question reflect a number of teachers who did not answer that particular question.

Summary of Report and Policy Implications

There are a number of conclusions that can be made from this report, with the caveat that the portfolio assessment has only been fully implemented in the areas of elementary education, music, physical education and social studies for one school year. As a result, data is not available on the performance of third year teachers in these areas, as their portfolios will not be submitted and scored until the spring of 2003. In addition, some demographic breakdowns and analyses of portfolio performance data have been deferred until there are several years of data upon which to draw more reliable conclusions. Nonetheless, the report yields some important information.

The vast majority of beginning teachers successfully completed the portfolio assessment with their first submission. Over the past three years, of the 3,759 teachers submitting portfolios under the “full implementation status¹,” 90 percent, on average, met the portfolio standard with their first portfolio submission, although the percentage varies somewhat from discipline to discipline.

The 10 percent who did not meet the standard on their first try were offered “portfolio assessment conferences,” in which a portfolio scorer/trainer provided individualized feedback to the candidate. These teachers were also encouraged to seek support from trained portfolio scorers in their district or region and attend the BEST Program beginning teacher content-specific seminars. To date, 24 out of the 1,056 total individuals who first submitted portfolios in 1999-2000 or 2000-2001, or 2 percent, either did not meet the performance standard or did not submit a portfolio in their third year of teaching. These preliminary figures indicate the success of the BEST Program’s goal of improving teaching practice through feedback on the portfolio assessment, district and school-based support and state-sponsored professional development. The beginning teachers who received a score of “1” during 2001-2002 will have up to two additional opportunities to submit a portfolio during the 2002-2003 school year. Data on the pass rate of this cohort of third year teachers will be presented to the State Board in December 2003.

It should be noted that the portfolio performance standard is based upon the foundational skills and competencies as well as discipline-specific competencies of the Common Core of Teaching. Committees of educators within each discipline have operationalized these standards on the basis of actual teaching performances as represented through the portfolio assessment. These standards are re-examined periodically for validity. As noted above, there may be some variance in the distribution of scores across disciplines and from year to year. More analysis of data across multiple years is needed to explain these differences. Possible reasons include differences in the pool of candidates from year to year (“cohort effect”), insufficient alignment between standards for teacher preparation and BEST Program standards, or need for additional training of mentors and other individuals who support beginning teachers. In those portfolio areas that have been fully implemented for several years, there is a general trend towards improvement in candidates’ performance over time.

Beginning teachers in priority districts do not do as well in the portfolio assessment as those beginning teachers in the more affluent districts. In general, the range of performance in the portfolio assessment as reflected by the distribution of scores is directly correlated to the relative affluence and resources of the district (as defined by Educational Reference Group). Several possible hypotheses can be offered here: (1) the pool of beginning teachers hired in the highest need districts may differ from that in more affluent districts that can offer either higher salaries or better working conditions; and (2)

¹ Subsection (d) of Sections 10-145f and 10-220a of the Connecticut General Statutes

there may be differential levels of support provided to beginning teachers in highest need districts. More study and analyses will be needed to explain the reason(s) for these differences.

The majority of beginning teachers reported receiving adequate support from their mentors during both their first and second years of teaching. During their first year, 65 percent of beginning teachers reported that they received adequate support from a mentor or mentor support team with at least one member in the same content area as the beginning teacher. During their second year, when they were completing the portfolio assessment, 64 percent reported that they received support from a formally assigned mentor, although the BEST Program only requires a formally assigned mentor during year one.

Beginning teachers also reported that they received support from other individuals, and reported relatively high levels of satisfaction with the support they received from these individuals. Beginning teachers successfully sought help from other sources when completing their portfolios. High levels of satisfaction were reported from nearly two-thirds of second year teachers who received help from teachers who had previously completed portfolios previously or fellow beginning teachers who were also completing portfolios. Other sources of assistance perceived as very helpful (with over 76 percent reporting high levels of satisfaction) were the formally assigned mentor, BEST seminar leaders and other colleagues. Fewer than half of beginning teachers sought help from principals, district facilitators and department chairs and reported slightly lesser levels of helpfulness from these individuals. These data suggest that more training in the portfolio process needs to be provided to building- and district-level administrators.

Beginning teachers reported that the portfolio afforded them the opportunity to demonstrate their teaching competency. These data support the validity of the portfolio assessment from the perspective of the candidate. More studies, however, are needed to evaluate the impact of the portfolio assessment upon the teaching practices of beginning teachers after they complete the portfolio, the impact of the portfolio and standards-based professional development on student achievement, and the impact of Connecticut portfolio induction process on the teacher practices of mentors and portfolio scorers. In order for such studies to be valid, several years of data are needed once the portfolios have been fully implemented in the full complement of content areas.

Continuous Improvement of the BEST Program

The BEST Program has been an important cornerstone in the effort to attract and retain qualified teachers in the classroom—by supporting new teachers in the critical induction years, by promoting effective teaching practices linked to improving student achievement, and providing opportunities for experienced educators to serve in new roles, such as mentors and assessors. The Department will continue to make improvements to the BEST Program. Examples of initiatives being taken this year include:

- (1) Continued streamlining of portfolio requirements, including elimination of almost all forms and tables, shortening of commentaries, and number of instructional hours or lessons reviewed and—in some content areas—reduced;
- (2) Review and improvement of individualized portfolio performance profiles provided to each beginning teacher;

- (3) Encouragement of principals, mentors and other colleagues or supervisors to accompany beginning teachers to portfolio assessment conferences, which are offered to all beginning teachers who do not initially “pass” the portfolio assessment;
- (4) Expansion of professional development opportunities for administrators and other educators around the portfolio process, by (a) offering one-day portfolio support sessions to individuals other than formally assigned mentors who support beginning teachers, and (b) making the content-specific beginning teacher “on-line” seminars more accessible to all educators who want to know more about the BEST portfolio;
- (5) Encouragement for districts to use expanded federal Title II Teacher Quality grants to support beginning teachers and their mentors (e.g., payment of mentor stipends, provision of professional development to mentors and beginning teachers and mentors, payment for substitute teachers to provide released time to beginning teachers and their mentors); and
- (6) Promoting a “master mentor” model of support, in which trained teacher leaders provide support and training to mentors, support colleagues and beginning teachers at the building level. Currently, 15 districts are participating in this year’s “pilot.”

The state’s current and projected fiscal situation present the BEST Program with challenges as the Department seeks to continue its mission of training both novice and experienced educators in effective teaching practices. As noted earlier, the high success rate of beginning teachers completing the BEST portfolio is due to the availability of trained mentors/mentor teams and access to high quality professional development, both at the state, regional and local district level.

The BEST Program—as well as related initiatives to attract and retain qualified teachers in every Connecticut classroom—will need to be examined critically to ensure that the federal mandates of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation are fulfilled. The BEST program will also need to continue playing a key role in Connecticut’s agenda of promoting a high quality teaching force as integral to ensuring equity and excellence for all Connecticut students. As a consequence, the Department will be convening a task force during the calendar year 2003 to re-examine Connecticut’s Continuum for Teacher Quality to ensure that all its teachers and school leaders develop programs that will build upon the successes of the past and meet the challenges of the future.